

*Testimony to House Education Committee
Opposing SB 123
March 21, 2007
Presented by Beth Emter, Clancy*

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SB 123

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, for the record my name is Beth Emter, and I am a parent from Clancy, here today in opposition to SB 123.

I oppose full-time kindergarten for two reasons. First, it is a prime example of too much, too soon. Five-year olds should be allowed the chance to enter into a lifetime of formal education in a gradual way, with a half-day kindergarten program as part of this approach. Proponents of full-time kindergarten tout examples of children achieving beyond their years, simply because educators have more time to teach them. However, placing such standards and expectations on young children like this is, in my view, unnecessary and possibly even detrimental to their social and academic well-being. Yes, there are studies that indicate benefits to full-time kindergarten, but there are also those that find children's benefits are short-term, and others that suggest there may be negative impacts on those children exposed to full-time kindergarten. Are we willing to treat our young five- and six-year olds as "experiments" without fully knowing the impacts full-time kindergarten can have? I hope the answer is no.

Secondly, SB 123 places an unreasonable and unnecessary financial burden on our public schools and on our state budget, and for unproven results. Our school administrators and teachers—and even OPI—claim our educational system as it currently exists is under-funded. If these claims are true, why would we even consider allocating hundreds of millions of hard-earned taxpayer dollars for a NEW program that is unnecessary and has unproven results? Wouldn't funding be better spent improving the schools we already have, and ~~possibly~~ helping those students who would supposedly benefit from a full-time kindergarten program?

As a stay-at-home mother of two young children, ages 2 and 4, my family has made significant financial sacrifice to ensure that one parent is always the primary caregiver in our home. This bill is nothing less than a slap in the face of our decision to ensure our hand in our children's upbringing. I am offended by the claim that children would benefit from being in kindergarten all day as opposed to spending those critical early years with one or both parents as often as possible. And as a taxpayer, the assertion that I can just "opt out" of kindergarten for my children is completely illogical.

I appreciate your work on behalf of Montana's children, and I hope you will vote against full-time kindergarten. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.